U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

Macedonia

Advancing Freedom and Democracy Reports - 2008
Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor
May 23, 2008

Part 1

The Republic of Macedonia is a parliamentary democracy with a population of approximately 2.1 million. The president, who is popularly elected, is head of state and commander−in−chief of the armed forces. A unicameral parliament exercises legislative authority. Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski, who heads a multiethnic governing coalition, was confirmed in office in August 2006 following parliamentary elections that generally met international standards. The government generally respects the human rights of its citizens; but problems exist in some areas. Police abuse of suspects continues to be a problem; however, authorities took measures to strengthen oversight of police. Corruption in the interior and justice ministries, and political pressure exerted on them, the courts, and the public prosecutor's office, impede the investigation and prosecution of some allegations of human rights abuse. Societal discrimination against ethnic minorities, particularly Roma, continues to be a problem; however, tensions between the ethnic Macedonian and Albanian populations continue to decrease.

Part 2

The top U.S. priorities in Macedonia include helping the government and its citizens to continue the reforms needed to build and consolidate strong, stable political institutions that promote democratic values and human rights. These reforms are key conditions for the country's continued progress toward NATO and EU integration, which are also its top foreign policy priorities. The United States supports ongoing democratic development in three broad areas: law enforcement and justice; political institutions, including the parliament, municipalities, and political parties; and media and civil society. The United States is working to strengthen the ability of law enforcement to combat organized crime and corruption, while simultaneously demonstrating an increased sensitivity to treating all citizens in an equitable and respectful manner. The United States also works to enhance the ability of the judicial sector to administer its caseload in a professional and transparent manner.

The United States promotes good governance and strengthens democratic systems, goals that complement efforts to bolster the rule of law. This includes working with the parliament and political parties to make these institutions a more effective and transparent embodiment of citizens' interests. The United States also provides continued assistance to enhance the capacity of municipalities to undertake new responsibilities. The United States works to strengthen the capacity of civil society organizations to represent citizen interests, and to monitor government decisions and activities. In addition, the United States supports the development of professional, objective, responsible, and economically viable media outlets, helping ensure the free exchange of ideas and information that are fundamental in a democracy.

Part 3

The development of more effective, transparent, and independent judicial and law enforcement institutions is a major U.S. priority. U.S. programs provide technical expertise, training, and material assistance to develop the judiciary to make it a stronger, more effective and independent institution. These programs increase citizen trust in, and respect for, the judicial system by strengthening its capacity to operate in a more transparent, effective, and accountable manner. In addition U.S. programs improve the functioning of the courts through timely and effective implementation of structural changes in the judiciary, through the introduction of modern court administration practices and procedures, and strengthening the capacity of police and prosecutors to conduct investigations and prosecutions of organized crime and corruption cases in a professional, non-partisan, and accountable manner.

To enhance democratic governance, the United States is working closely with three key building blocks of a democratic system: the parliament, political parties, and local governments. The U.S. is working with parliament to increase the accountability of elected officials; engage the participation of women and minority communities in the political process; and ensure the integrity of the election process. U.S. programs provide technical assistance, training, and limited operational support to the parliament to introduce and improve practices such as public hearings, legislative review, and research. The United States also works with members of parliament to enhance their ability to represent citizens' interests in the legislative process, in part by establishing constituency offices around the country. The United States works to facilitate the development of representative, open, and policy-based political parties, with an increased focus on issue-based programs, proactive political communications, and the participation of women, minorities, and youth in political institutions. For example, the United States supports a club for women parliamentarians and supports minority parties with training on coalition building and candidate selection among other issues.

The United States also supports anti-corruption efforts through e-governance programming, local government capacity-building and the development and implementation of the government's comprehensive Anti-corruption Strategy and Action Plan (including an effective anti-corruption public awareness campaign). For example, U.S. programs provide technical assistance, training, and systems support to local governments, on subjects including fiscal and budget management, local revenue raising, community participation and planning, and development of local government associations. This support helps local governments become more financially sustainable while increasing their transparency and accountability to citizens.

Part 4

The United States also supports an active, independent, and responsible civil society as a critical element of democracy. The United States is working to help build the capacity of the country's prolific NGOs to represent citizen interests, advocate for public reform, build partnerships with public and private sectors, and deliver needed social services where the state is absent. The United States supports NGO advocacy and service provision activities, anticorruption initiatives, monitoring and watchdog functions, and human rights awareness activities in a variety of fields and geographic areas with financial and technical assistance. The United States also supports reforms in the legal framework for NGOs, has introduced new operating models for NGOs to generate resources and promote philanthropy, and promotes volunteerism among citizens.

The United States supports development of a professional and independent media. While press freedom is not restricted, there is room for improvement in the quality and professionalism of some of the reporting and editing. The United States provides training throughout the country for journalists interested in sharpening their investigative reporting skills. In addition, the U.S. government sends journalists to attend U.S.-based programs that focus on the importance of an independent media in a strong democracy. As a result of this programming, participants return with increased motivation and skill.

Given the U.S. government's global concern with trafficking in persons, the United States supports civil society and government agency efforts to combat trafficking in persons. The United States provides financial support to NGOs that work with the government to set up a 24-hour telephone hotline for trafficking victims; create a center to provide victims or potential victims with economic and psychological support; train social service providers (teachers, healthcare workers, psychologists, etc.) about trafficking; and conduct a media awareness-raising campaign.

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